

Speaking Anxiety Level of Gaza EFL Pre-service Teachers: Reasons and Sources

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Abstract

Though speaking is perceived to be the most anxiety-provoking element of foreign and second language (FL, L2) education (Marzec-Stawrarska, 2015), very limited research has been conducted on this issue in the Palestinian English as a foreign Language (EFL) context. The present study's purpose was identifying Gaza EFL pre-service teachers' speaking anxiety level and the reasons behind such anxiety. For achieving the study purposes, 279 students were asked to respond to a closed-question questionnaire, 61 students completed an open-question questionnaire, and six EFL instructors were interviewed in this study. Analyzing the data, results showed that Gaza EFL pre-service teachers' speaking anxiety level was high, and the potential sources for such anxiety included teachers' inappropriate procedures, students' inability to use only-English in English classes, students' fear of negative evaluation, and students' sensitivity to teachers' correcting comments. Finally, the study presented some relevant suggestions and implications for reducing Gaza EFL pre-service teachers' speaking anxiety.

Keywords: *speaking anxiety; Gaza; EFL pre-service teachers; sources*

1. Introduction

Speaking is perceived to be the most anxiety-provoking element of foreign and second language education (Marzec-Stawrarska, 2015), in that speaking in front of peers and teachers may increase the feeling of nervousness and stress. Such feelings may hinder the development of language proficiency (Peng, 2014; Piechurska-Kuciel, 2011). Regarding this issue, research showed that students experienced more anxiety in foreign language classes than other classes (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Additionally, many educators have regarded language anxiety as an important factor that contributes to success and failure in foreign language classes (Krashen, 1985; Peng, 2014).

Though research on FL speaking anxiety has recently increased (e.g., Fariadian, Azizifar, & Gowhary, 2014; Liu, 2009; Mesri, 2012; Tsu-Chia, 2012; Tum & Kunt, 2013), very limited research has been conducted on this issue in the Palestinian EFL context. During her previous experience as a teacher of English in Gaza schools and Al-Quds Open University and her present experience as an assistant professor of Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) at Al-Aqsa University, one of the researchers noticed that Gaza EFL students tended to feel anxious when speaking English. Additionally, based on her previous service as a headmistress in Gaza governmental secondary schools, the other researcher observed students' anxiety in speaking classes at Gaza secondary schools. Moreover, Yahya (2013) provided that Palestinian teachers complained about the level of their students' participation and interaction in English classes. Therefore, the present study aimed to examine Gaza EFL teacher students' speaking anxiety level.

According to Palestinian Ministry of Education (2013), Gaza includes three types of universities: governmental universities, non-governmental public universities, and private universities. The universities of the first type depend mainly on the funds provided by Palestinian government. Non-governmental public universities are funded by no-governmental institutions. Finally, private universities are owned by individual educators. The three types administer the same entry system which is the successful completion of secondary school with a minimum grade of 60% average. Each university includes a number of faculties capable of giving at least B.A. (Bachelor of Arts) degree. Faculties of Education programs in all universities are nearly identical (i.e., *English Language Teaching*,

Arabic Language Teaching, etc.). As mentioned earlier, one of the researchers served as a teacher of English language at Gaza schools and Al-Quds Open University, and she currently works as an assistant professor of TEFL at Al-Aqsa University. She noticed that EFL pre-service teachers tended to feel anxious when speaking in English classes. Based on that, the present study's purpose was identifying Gaza EFL pre-service teachers' speaking anxiety level and the reasons behind such anxiety.

2. Research Questions

1. What is speaking anxiety level of Gaza EFL pre-service teachers?
2. Are there statistically significant differences in speaking anxiety level of Gaza EFL pre-service teachers attributed to their achievement level?
3. What are sources of speaking anxiety among Gaza EFL pre-service teachers?

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Definition of Terms

Anxiety

For Leaver, Ehrman, and Shekhtman (2005), *anxiety* is a sort of nervous-system arousal that happens when doing a task like learning a language. Additionally, American Psychological Association (2015) defines *anxiety* as "an emotion characterized by feeling of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes. Wooten (2008) also views *anxiety* as "a negative mood of apprehension accompanied with physiological characteristics."

Anxiety in this study is defined as a negative feeling accompanied by low thinking ability, physical changes, and negative behaviors.

Speaking

According to Bailey (2008), *speaking* is the productive aural/oral skill that includes conveying meaning through producing verbal utterances systematically. Moreover, Cheng (2007) states that *speaking* is "a closed loop wherein the conversation can only occur where there are two individuals, the communicator and the recipient". Furthermore, Fulcher (2003) views that *speaking* is the verbal use of language to communicate with others.

This study defines *speaking* as a productive aural/oral process that consists of using grammatical rules, cohesive devices, lexical items, phonological rules for expressing one's thoughts and feelings in speech.

3.2 Symptoms of High Foreign Language Anxiety

Ortega (2009) states that foreign language speaking anxiety includes many symptoms such as freezing up and getting confused in spite of having studied hard. Hanna and Gibson (1987) provide that public speaking anxiety is manifested in many ways (i.e., blood pressure, hand trembling, weakness in some parts of the body, feeling anxious, forgetting the prepared material, and avoiding looking at the audience).

3.3 Factors Contributing to FL/L2 Speaking Anxiety

A number of factors contribute to FL speaking anxiety including linguistic factors, psychological factors, and cultural factors. The first factor is low linguistic abilities. According to Kojima (2007), the learner who has insufficient linguistic knowledge (grammar, pronunciation, and lexis) tends to have a high level of anxiety. In this respect, the interview results in Kayaoglu and Saglamel's study (2013) indicated that linguistic difficulties (vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation) increased language anxiety of 30 Turkish EFL students. Moreover, Melouah (2013) investigated the sources of oral performance anxiety of 54 Algerian EFL university students, and the study concluded that among such sources was low language proficiency. Likewise, using semi-structured interviews, Tanveer (2007) concluded that the causes of speaking anxiety for 20 EFL/ESL learners stemmed from language learning difficulties. In contrast, some studies (e.g., Awan, Azher, Anwar, & Naz, 2010; Fariadian, Azizifar, & Gowhary, 2014; Mahmoodzadeh, 2012) showed that it was language anxiety that affected EFL students' language achievement. For example, Awan, Azher, Anwar, and Naz (2010) revealed that language anxiety of 149 EFL students affected their language performance in University of Sargodha. Moreover, Fariadian, Azizifar, and Gowhary (2014) explored the relationship between anxiety and English speaking among 80 Iranian EFL learners. Using The Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, (1986), the study concluded that the higher the FLCAS score was, the low English speaking was. Furthermore, Mahmoodzadeh (2012) indicated

that FL knowledge did not necessarily lead to reduction in EFL speaking anxiety of 74 Iranian students studying English in an institute. It may be argued here that both speaking anxiety and linguistic competence can influence each other.

Another important factors are psychological factors. There is a close relationship between personality traits and L2 learning. For example, extroverted people are generally happier to communicate with other people (Kojima, 2007). Furthermore, perfectionists and anxious learners have a number of characteristics such as higher performance standards, and higher level of worries over errors (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). According to Horwitz et al (1986), communication apprehension (fear of communication with people), fear of negative evaluation (apprehension about others' evaluation), and test anxiety (anxiety stemming from fear of failure) contribute to language anxiety. Furthermore, FLCAS of Horwitz et al data in Mak's study (2011) revealed that fear of negative evaluation, negative self-evaluation, negative attitudes towards English classroom, and fear of failing contributed to speaking-in-class anxiety of 313 Chinese ESL university students. Likewise, Ohata (2005) examined the nature of language anxiety as perceived by 5 Japanese ESL college learners. The in-depth interviews showed that fear of negative evaluation and lack of self-confidence caused the participants' language anxiety. Additionally, the observations and interviews data in Zhiping and Paramasivam's study (2013) indicated that fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension caused anxiety among 8 EFL international postgraduate students of a Malaysian university.

Additionally, lack of cultural backgrounds of the target language precludes from a good understanding of the language, and therefore, increases anxiety level (Kojima, 2007). Examining the causes of speaking anxiety for 20 EFL/ESL learners, Tanveer (2007) indicated that language anxiety stemmed from differences in learners' culture and target language culture.

In addition to the factors related to learners, a number of sources outside the learner can contribute to learners' language anxiety, i.e., absence of teacher support, unsympathetic personality, lack of personal attention (Horwitz, Tallon, & Luo, 2010). Students' anxiety also increases when there is a lack of engagement in classroom activities, lack of cooperation, inappropriate teacher teaching style, stressful classroom atmosphere, lack of time, and inappropriate teaching contents (Alrabai, 2014). Utilizing qualitative interviews, Riasati (2011) showed that the causes of language anxiety as perceived by three Iranian EFL adult learners included lack of preparation and the types of activities being implemented. Furthermore, Ferdous (2012) examined sources of language anxiety among 60 EFL university students in Bangladesh, and the study indicated that the most disturbing aspect was related to teachers. Likewise, Subasi (2010) investigated the sources of English anxiety among 55 Turkish university learners in oral practice. The study revealed that teachers' manners and teaching procedures were main sources of students' anxiety in English oral practice.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The present study utilized the descriptive method for examining Gaza EFL pre-service teachers' speaking anxiety and the reasons behind such anxiety. Koul (2009) states that the descriptive research method assists in explaining educational phenomena, i.e., conditions, opinions, and processes and in solving problems about pupils, school organization, and teaching methods.

4.2 Research Ethics

For Anderson and Arsenault (1998), the researcher should be responsible for informing the participants of the nature and purpose of research, its risks, its benefits, and its procedures. Additionally, participants should be informed that their participation is voluntary. All participants took part in the study voluntarily, and gave consents to the researchers.

4.3 Participants

A number of 279 (220 females and 59 males) fourth year B.A. English language teaching majors responded to a closed-question questionnaire in this study. They were randomly selected from three universities in Gaza Strip. Gaza Strip includes seven universities with 681 fourth year B.A. English language teaching majors (535 females and 146 males). The three universities were selected based on university type i.e., governmental university, independent public university, and private university; the gender attending it, i.e., males, females; and the areas the students were belonging to, i.e., South of Gaza Strip, North of Gaza Strip. The researchers selected the fourth year students because they were supposed to pass all speaking courses and get familiar with speaking English on public. All the students

had been studying English as a foreign language for eleven years, and their ages ranged from twenty to twenty two years old. Furthermore, the researchers considered the students' achievement levels in English language i.e., students whose General Point Averages (GPA) ranged from 90%-100%, 80%-89%, 70%-79% and 60%-69%.

Out of the 270 participants, 66 ones volunteered to respond to an open-question questionnaire. Then, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with six EFL speaking instructors selected from all EFL speaking instructors working in Gaza universities (twelve instructors). The six participants were selected with regard to university type i.e., governmental university, independent public university, and private university.

4.4 Instruments

The researchers designed three instruments in this study: a closed-question questionnaire, an open-question questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview. The researchers checked the content validity and face validity of the instruments.

4.4.1 A Closed-Question Questionnaire

In closed-question questionnaire, there's a predictable small list of answers (Bruce, 2004). Reviewing literature (Alrabi, 2014; Horwitz et al,1986;Yaikhong & Usaha, 2012) related to FL/L2 speaking anxiety, the researchers designed a closed-question questionnaire consisting of four categories 'Physical Changes', 'Negative Feelings', 'Low Thinking Ability', and 'Negative Behaviors'. The questionnaire items required multiple choice answers with a five-point Likert scale: 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Uncertain, 4=Disagree, and 5=Strongly Disagree. The content validity of the questionnaire was checked through validating the items by a group of experts. Moreover, its internal consistency was determined using Cronbach Alpha. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), Cronbach Alpha is utilized for measuring reliability of an instrument. Johnson and Christensen (2012) indicate that for an instrument to be reliable, an internal consistency of 0.70 or over is required. The Alpha coefficient for the overall questionnaire (18 items) was at 0.84 which is considered a high level of reliability. Table 1 shows Alpha coefficients for the questionnaire categories.

Table 1. Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient of the Questionnaire Categories

No.	Categories	Number of Items	Cronbach alpha coefficient
1	Physical Changes	5	0.82
2	Negative Feelings	6	0.75
3	Low Thinking Ability	3	0.77
4	Negative Behaviors	4	0.83
Total		18	0.84

4.4.2 An Open-Question Questionnaire

An open-question questionnaire is utilized when the participants' answers are not suggested in the question, and the participants may provide long full answers (Bruce, 2004). After examining some relevant studies (e.i., Alrabi, 2014; Horwitz et al, 1986; Yaikhong & Usaha, 2012), the researchers designed an open-question questionnaire. The questionnaire included the following question: Why do you feel anxious when speaking English? (i.e., teachers' procedures, insufficient linguistic competence, fear of evaluation, etc.)

4.4.3 A Semi-Structured Interview

For the questionnaire data to be supplemented, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with six EFL speaking instructors. According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtler (2006), semi-structured interviews can help in gathering in-depth data about the phenomenon. After considering some relevant references (e.g., e.i., Alrabi, 2014; Horwitz et al, 1986; Yaikhong & Usaha, 2012), the researchers developed the interview questions (i.e., why do you think Gaza EFL pre-service teachers feel anxious when speaking English?, does linguistic knowledge contribute to EFL pre-service teachers' speaking anxiety level?, do EFL pre-service teachers complain when you provide them with immediate oral feedbacks? why?). Each interview lasted thirty minutes, and was audio-recorded for transcription.

4.5 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The researchers administered the study instruments at three universities in Gaza in the second semester of the academic year 2014-2015 (February and March 2015). First, while 279 students responded to the closed question

questionnaire, 61 students completed the open-question questionnaire. Then, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with six EFL speaking instructors selected from Gaza universities. Each interview lasted for thirty minutes, and it was audio-taped.

In analyzing the study data, first, the closed- question questionnaire data were processed statistically using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The participants' responses to the questionnaires were analyzed in terms of percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Second, to determine the statistical differences between the students' EFL speaking anxiety levels, the researchers used analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Bonferroni Test. According to Kothari (2004), analysis of variance is utilized to investigate the significance of the differences between more than two sets of scores. Moreover, Bretz, Hothorn, and Westfall (2011) state that Bonferroni test is the best known multiplicity adjustment, and it compares the unadjusted P-values. It is noteworthy that the participants were divided into four groups: students whose GPA ranged from 90%-100%, 80%-89%, 70%-79% and 60%-69%.

For analyzing the open-question questionnaire data, the researchers used the rubrics included in Gillham (2000): students' written responses to the questionnaire were carefully reviewed, coded, and organized into three main categories including minor ones. Such categories included teachers' negative procedures (i.e., lack of encouraging atmosphere in classrooms, teachers' negligence of evaluating oral skills, teachers' interruption of students while speaking, teacher-centered-classrooms), students' inability to use only-English in English classes, students' fear of negative evaluation including students' fear of negative evaluation due to students' perfectionist tendencies and students' fear of negative evaluation due to students' low perception of linguistic abilities.

To analyze the interviews data, the researchers employed the analysis steps given by Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2006). The interviews were transcribed, coded, and organized into two main categories including students' lack of linguistic competence and students' sensitivity to instructors' correcting comments. To establish the interviews data credibility, both researchers reviewed and coded the data, and they agreed on 85% of the coded data.

5. Results

5.1 Results of First Research Question

To answer the first research question 'What is speaking anxiety level of Gaza EFL pre-service teachers?', the researchers utilized a closed-question questionnaire. The following rubrics were used to identify Gaza EFL pre-service teachers' speaking anxiety level in this study:

Very Low: 1.0 -1.80

Low: 1.81 - 2.60

Moderate: 2.61 - 3.40

High: 3.41 - 4.20

Very High: 4.21 -5.0

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Percentages of the Participants' Responses to the Questionnaire Items

Category	Mean	Standard deviation	percentage
1. Physical Changes	3.66	0.89	73.3
2. Negative Feelings	3.22	0.51	64.4
3. Low Thinking Abilities	3.54	0.90	70.7
4. Negative Behaviors	3.44	1.03	68.8
Total	3.41	0.63	68.3

Table 2 indicates that the level of the students' speaking anxiety in this study was high (3.41). While the first, third, and the fourth categories fell into high level, the second category got moderate level. It seems that the negative feelings the participants experienced were probably manifested in a number of physical changes (i.e., hand trembling

and weakness in some parts of the body), low thinking abilities (i.e., forgetting the prepared material and getting confused), and negative behaviors (i.e., avoiding academic challenge and avoiding looking at the audience).

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations, and Percentages of 'Physical Changes' Items in the Questionnaire

No	Physical Changes	Mean	Standard deviation	Percentage
1	My heart is pounding, when I'm going to be called on to speak English.	4.01	1.01	80.1
2	Even when I'm well- prepared, I tremble when knowing that I'm going to be called to speak English.	3.83	1.08	76.6
3	I start to tremble when I have to speak English without a preparation in advance.	3.91	1.15	78.1
4	I freeze up in English role play activities.	3.28	1.21	65.5
5	Certain parts of my body (stomach, legs, hands, etc) feel very tense while speaking English.	3.30	1.34	66.0
Total		3.66	0.89	73.3

Table 3 shows that the level of physical changes the participants experienced when having EFL speaking anxiety was high (3.66). While the first two items fell into the high level, the last two items got moderate level. This data may assume that the participants' anxiety increased more when participants are going to be called on to speak English than while speaking. Moreover, the data in Table 3 indicate that item 3 got high level, the thing which may suggest that preparation in advance may have a role in reducing the physical changes the participants experienced when speaking English.

Table 4. Means, Standard Deviations, and Percentages of 'Negative Feelings' Items in the Questionnaire

No.	Negative Feelings	Mean	Standard deviation	Percentage
6	I do not enjoy the experience of speaking English	2.63	1.32	52.6
7	I feel afraid when speaking English.	3.20	1.47	63.9
8	Even when I'm well- prepared, I feel anxious about speaking English.	2.92	1.43	58.3
9	I feel anxious when I'm going to be called on to speak English without a preparation in advance.	3.67	1.05	73.4
10	I feel anxious while waiting to speak English.	3.53	1.21	70.6
11	I dislike using my voice and body expressively while speaking English.	3.39	1.25	67.7
Total		3.22	0.51	64.4

Table 4 shows that the level of the participants' negative feelings was moderate (3.22). While items 6, 7, 8 and 11 fell into the moderate level, the rest of the items got the high level. It seems that the participants' anxiety increased when they were going to be called on to speak English without a preparation and when waiting to speak English.

Table 5. Means, Standard Deviations, and Percentages of 'Low Cognitive Ability' Items in the Questionnaire

No.	Low cognitive Ability	Mean	Standard deviation	Percentage
12	My thoughts are confused when speaking English.	3.58	1.07	71.6
13	In speaking activities, I forget things I know.	3.61	0.98	72.2
14	I can not find answers for my colleagues' questions inspite of having prepared the material.	3.42	1.20	68.4
	Total	3.54	0.90	70.7

As shown by data in Table 5, the participants' EFL speaking anxiety caused a high level of low cognitive abilities (3.54), the thing which indicates that students' EFL anxiety can affect their cognitive abilities.

Table 6. Means, Standard Deviations, and Percentages of 'Negative Behaviors' Items in the Questionnaire

	Negative Behaviors	Mean	Standard deviation	Percentage
15	I avoid academic challenges such as voluntary speaking.	3.57	1.17	71.5
16	I withdraw easily from speaking activities in English classes.	3.44	1.24	68.7
17	I have trouble to coordinate my movements while speaking English.	3.36	1.23	67.2
18	I do not look at the audience while speaking English.	3.39	1.39	67.9
		3.44	1.03	68.8

As shown in Table 6, the participants had negative behaviors when they felt anxious. This data may suggest that the students' anxiety is manifested through their negative behaviors.

5.2 Results of Second Research Question

For answering the second research question 'Are there statistically significant differences in speaking anxiety level of Gaza EFL pre-service teachers attributed to their achievement level?', ANOVA was used. Table 7 shows ANOVA values:

Table 7. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Values

	Source of variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Significance level
EFL speaking anxiety	Between groups	19.607	3	6.536		
	Within groups	70.431	241	0.292	22.364	0.000*
	Total	90.038	244			

* Value of "p-value" statistically significant

Table 7 shows that there are statistically significant difference in the participants' EFL speaking anxiety level attributed to achievement level (F=22.364,p-value<0.05). Moreover, Table 8 presents Bonferroni analysis values.

Table 8. Bonferroni Analysis Values

	GAP	Mean	60-69	70-79	80-89	90-100
EFL speaking anxiety	60-69	3.97	1	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*
	70-79	3.50		1	0.000*	0.000*
	80-89	3.23			1	0.000*
	90-100	2.43				1

* Value of "p-value" statistically significant

As shown in Table 8, there are statistically significant differences between the participants' EFL speaking anxiety levels attributed to achievement level in favor of the students whose GPA scores ranged from 60-69, followed by 70-79, then 80-89, and finally 90-100.

5.3 Results of Third Research Question

5.3.1 Results of the Open-question Questionnaire

An open-question questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were administered to answer the third research question, 'What are sources of speaking anxiety among Gaza EFL pre-service teachers?' Results revealed the factors contributing to Gaza EFL pre-service teachers' speaking anxiety as reported by the teacher students themselves. Such factors included teachers' negative procedures (i.e., lack of encouraging atmosphere in classrooms, teachers' negligence of evaluating oral skills, teachers' interruption of students while speaking, teacher-centered classrooms), students' inability to use only-English in English classes, students' fear of negative evaluation including students' fear of negative evaluation due to students' perfectionist tendencies and students' fear of negative evaluation due to students' low perception of linguistic abilities.

Most students in this study (50 students) attributed their anxiety when speaking English to their university teachers' procedures in classrooms. According to such students, their instructors did not provide encouraging atmospheres in classrooms:

A male student with middle achievement level: *I passed a very severe experience at the beginning of my study at the university. I mispronounced a word in the first semester of my education at the university, the teacher laughed at me and said "How did you join English department? You should join any department other than English department", and all my colleagues laughed at me. Indeed, I never attempted to speak English since that time.*

Moreover, a large number of students (40 students) were not satisfied with their teachers' evaluation techniques, in that most EFL instructors tended to neglect evaluating students' oral skills.

A male student with high achievement level: *Because most of our university tests are written, we pay attention neither to listening nor to speaking. Our instructors don't give me any scores for oral activities, and consequently I don't try to practice speaking in classes and get rid of anxiety while speaking English.*

Many other students (30 students), specifically, low achievers of English, complained that their teachers usually interrupted them while speaking English and such interruption got them anxious:

A female student with low achievement level: *I avoid speaking English because my instructors tend to interrupt me while speaking. I feel that I know nothing when teachers interrupt me.*

Related to the teachers' procedures, a number of students (41 students) expressed their dissatisfaction with their teacher-centered classrooms. According to such students, teachers allowed them neither to give oral answers nor to conduct presentations.

As can be shown from the above, instructors' strategies and methods could contribute to Gaza EFL pre-service teachers' speaking anxiety.

Another factor contributing to participants' EFL speaking anxiety was students' inability to use only-English in English classes. Most participants (57 students) reported that they got anxious when the teachers asked them to use only-English in classes due to their use of Arabic in early stage of learning.

A third potential source of EFL speaking anxiety as reported by the teacher students in this study was fear of negative evaluation. Most students (50 students) reported that they were afraid of committing mistakes in front of others. It seems that a few students (10 students) felt afraid of speaking in front of others due to their perfectionist tendencies which pushed them to insist on high standards of performance in EFL speaking.

A female student with high achievement level: *Now I'm advanced student and I should consider both accuracy and fluency while speaking English. Prior to speaking English, I should think of tenses, sounds, vocabulary etc. I don't like to commit any mistakes in front of my teachers and peers at this advanced stage of learning.*

A male student with high achievement level: *I want to do the best I can in order not to be criticized by my instructors and colleagues.*

A second reason why the students felt afraid of speaking in front of others in English classes might be students' low perception of linguistic abilities. According to the open-question questionnaire data, a number of students (36 students) thought that they did not have the adequate linguistic competence necessary for conducting speaking activities in English classes.

A male student with high achievement level: *Sometimes, I feel afraid that I can not recall key words necessary for expressing my ideas and opinions.*

A female student with middle achievement level: *I always feel a afraid of criticizing looks. I think that I'm weak in grammar, and my teachers will criticize me because of my incorrect sentences.*

In sum, the open-question questionnaire revealed the sources of Gaza EFL pre-service teachers' speaking anxiety as reported by the teacher students themselves. Such sources included teachers' negative procedures (i.e., lack of encouraging atmosphere in classrooms, teachers' negligence of evaluating oral skills, teachers' interruption of students while speaking, teacher-centered classrooms), students' inability to use only-English in English classes, students' fear of negative evaluation including students' fear of negative evaluation due to students' perfectionist tendencies and students' fear of negative evaluation due to students' low perception of linguistic abilities.

5.3.2 Results of Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews data analysis revealed two potential sources for the students' speaking anxiety as perceived by their instructors. Such sources included students' lack of linguistic competence and students' sensitivity to instructors' correcting comments. All six interviewees viewed that students' EFL speaking anxiety stemmed from their lack of linguistic competence.

A male teacher with seven years of experience: *During my experience, I could notice that most anxious students are those with low proficiency level. High achievers of English usually are able to speak English confidently and effectively.*

A female teacher with eight years of experience: *Students with low and middle achievement levels are often reluctant during speaking. They stop for thinking about the words they will use, and sometimes they ask me about the English equivalents of some Arabic words. Sometimes, they stop their speech and say 'is my pronunciation wrong?' In fact, they can use neither phonological rules nor grammatical devices correctly. They need to improve their knowledge of grammar, lexis, phonetics, phonology, and morphology.*

Based on the above two excerpts, it appears that lack of linguistic competence was one of the main causes of speaking anxiety among Gaza EFL pre-service teachers.

The second source of EFL speaking anxiety was students' sensitivity to their instructors' oral feedback.

A male teacher with twenty years of experience: *A main problem is that most students are sensitive to my oral feedbacks. They feel embarrassed when I correct their linguistic mistakes. Sometimes students came to me and told me that my comments harmed them.*

A male teacher with fifteen years of experience: *I always notice that most students seem to be bothered by my immediate oral feedbacks, even when giving them correction in private. I can see that in their body language.*

In short, Gaza EFL speaking instructors viewed that the students' speaking anxiety stemmed from students' lack of linguistic competence and students' sensitivity to instructors' correcting comments.

6. Discussion and Implications

The closed-question questionnaire results showed that Gaza EFL pre-service teachers' speaking anxiety level was high, and such anxiety level increased when the participants did not prepare what they were going to speak. This result may be congruent with Riasati (2011) which showed that lack of preparation was one of the sources of language anxiety among Iranian EFL adult learners. In this regard, Mak (2011) views that for helping EFL learners to reduce their speaking anxiety, teachers should provide students with time to prepare their presentations before starting speaking. Moreover, Baker (2012) provides that preparation can reduce speaking anxiety in the class and can increase the richness of their vocabulary and grammar. Thus, Gaza EFL university instructors are advised to give students adequate time to prepare their speech prior to asking them to perform oral activities.

Moreover, the open-question questionnaire data revealed that teachers' procedures influenced the students' speaking anxiety level (i.e., lack of encouraging classrooms, teachers' negligence of evaluating oral skills, teachers' interruption of students while speaking, and teacher-centered classrooms. Similar to this result, Subasi (2010) revealed that teachers' manners and teaching procedures were main sources of Turkish EFL students' anxiety in English oral practice. Likewise, Ferdous (2012) indicated that the most aspect contributing to language anxiety of EFL university students in Bangladesh was related to teachers.

Most students complained in this study that they learnt English in teacher-centered classrooms and the teachers did

not provide them with opportunities through which they could use their oral skills. According to Liu (2009), lack of practice is a principal reason for students' anxiety in oral activities. Furthermore, Tseng (2012) states that the more students speak English, the more confidence they will get in speaking. Consequently, Gaza EFL university instructors are recommended to set speaking activities (i.e., presentations, dialogues, discussions, problem solving activities, and role plays) through which the students can practice speaking, and therefore, the students' speaking anxiety will be gradually reduced.

Another problem expressed by the students in this study was that some EFL instructors used to interrupt the students while speaking for the purpose of correcting them, the thing that might confuse them while speaking. In such situations, teachers need to wait till students finish speaking tasks, then provide them with the oral feedback necessary for improving their speaking performance. According to Hashami and Abbasi (2013), teachers should not interrupt students when they are communicating. Additionally, Hughes (2005) views that instructors can allow five or ten minutes at the end of speaking activities for feedback.

Furthermore, some students reported that they were afraid of speaking English, because they were not used to utilizing only-English in classrooms. According to such students, they tended to excessively use Arabic in early stages of learning. Similar to this finding, Hammad (2013) indicated that Gaza EFL preparatory school students highly used Arabic in their English reading classes, the thing which deprived students of using English fluently. In fact, the L1 use should be minimized in English classes at Gaza governmental schools. According to Nation (2003), L1 should never be used, and teachers should encourage students to use L2 in classrooms through setting tasks that are within students' linguistic competence, repeating tasks, acting the roles of native speakers, and convincing students with the importance of using L2.

Results also showed the factors related to the learners themselves. Such factors included students' fear of negative evaluation (i.e., students' fear of negative evaluation due to students' perfectionist tendencies and students' fear of negative evaluation due to students' low perception of linguistic abilities), students' sensitivity to instructors' correcting comments, and students' lack of linguistic competence. One important source of the participants' anxiety in this study was students' fear of negative evaluation. This finding may go with Mak's study (2011) which revealed that fear of negative evaluation contributed to speaking-in-class anxiety of Chinese ESL university students. Likewise, Ohata (2005) indicated that fear of negative evaluation caused language anxiety of Japanese ESL college learners. Zhiping and Paramasivam's study (2013) also concluded that fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension caused anxiety among EFL international postgraduate students of a Malaysian university.

Based on the open-question questionnaire data, it may be argued that one main reason for the participants' fear of negative evaluation was students' perfectionist tendencies. It was reported that some students strived for native-speaker fluency and perfect accent, and they became embarrassed when teachers provided them with oral feedback in front of others. In this aspect, Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) note that perfectionists language learners may experience learning anxiety.

Another important reason for the students' fear of negative evaluation was students' low perceptions of their linguistic abilities. In this study, a number of students reported that they did not trust their linguistic abilities, and were afraid of others' criticizing comments. According to Piechursha-kuciel (2015), the students who estimate their language abilities at high levels, initiate communicative situations confidently and effectively. It may be argued that it is the students' irrational thoughts and negative-self talk that increase their perfectionist tendencies and low perception of linguistic abilities. According to Hamilton (2011) and Kanar (2014), it may be the irrational ideas and negative self-talk the speaker has that cause speaking anxiety. For Hamilton, it is through cognitive restructuring one can avoid irrational beliefs and replace them with rational statements and practice such statements in stressful situations. Thus, for the teacher students in this study to reduce their speaking anxiety, they need to avoid irrational thoughts and negative self-talk.

Related to personality traits, the interviews data also revealed that most students were sensitive to their teachers' correcting comments. In fact, Gaza EFL university instructors need to talk about the role of mistakes to language learners in the classroom. They should convince the students that committing errors and mistakes is necessary for acquiring language, and it is an integral part of language learning. In this regard, Hashemi and Abbasi (2013) view that teachers should emphasize the role of errors to language learners.

Moreover, the interviews analysis showed that insufficient language abilities caused EFL speaking anxiety among the teacher students in this study. In line with this conclusion, Kayaoglu and Saglamlé' study (2013) indicated that linguistic difficulties (vocabulary grammar, and pronunciation) increased language anxiety of Turkish EFL students.

Moreover, Melouah (2013) concluded that low language proficiency contributed to language anxiety of Algerian EFL university students. Likewise, Tanveer (2007) indicated that the causes of speaking anxiety for EFL/ESL learners stemmed from language learning difficulties. According to Yaman and Ozcan (2015), improving EFL speaking requires sufficient linguistic competence. Hanna and Gibson (1987) also view that 'competence builds confidence'. Consequently, it is essential for Gaza EFL pre-service teachers to work on improving their linguistic knowledge which can be developed through hard conscious study.

A final suggestion for Gaza EFL pre-service teachers to alleviate EFL speaking anxiety is that they should practice some relaxation exercises before speaking in English classes i.e., breathing deeply, holding breath for a few seconds, and then slowly releasing. Kanar (2014) views that relaxation through deep breath before speaking is one of the techniques reducing a speaker's anxiety.

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